

## Workshop set up to resolve student conflicts

<http://www.phillytrib.com/the-learning-key/item/11242-workshop-set-up-to-resolve-student-conflicts.html>

- Written by [Chanel Hill](#)
- Tuesday, 15 October 2013 14:15
- font size
- [Print](#)



Twelfth-grade students of Tacony Academy High School collaborate during AVP training last month. American Paradigm Schools and Alternatives to Violence teamed up to provide workshops on conflict resolution for students at Tacony and First Philadelphia's Preparatory Charter School. — submitted photo

Whether it's bullying, dealing with problems and difficult people, struggling to get along in a group setting to achieve a set goal, or simply trying to avoid a fight by handling a disagreement peacefully, Philadelphia high school students are finding new and innovative ways to develop the skills to be confident leaders of peace in their communities.

American Paradigm Schools and Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) teamed up to provide a four-day workshop last month for students of Tacony Academy High School and First Philadelphia's Preparatory Charter School on conflict resolution.

Seventy-five AVP facilitators joined teachers, faculty and staff to deliver 27 AVP workshops to the students. About 500 students participated in workshops. Reflective listening, non-

violent language, respecting someone else point of view, violence and bullying were just some of the topics that were addressed at the workshops.

“The goal of the workshops was to help students develop anti-violence skills that they can not only use in school, but also in their communities,” said chief executive officer of American Paradigm Schools Stacey Cruise. “These students will be going to college soon and we want them to be responsible. What better way to start preparing them for their future, than to have workshops that is strictly based on personal development, conflict resolution, and how to make a difference in their own neighborhood.

This was not the first time that American Paradigm Schools and AVP worked together for a good cause. Both organizations recently announced the continuation and expansion of their partnership with each other. AVP previously worked with American Paradigm Schools in the opening of their newest school, Memphis Street Academy. Memphis Street, formerly known as John Paul Jones Middle School, stood as a Kensington middle school plagued by violence and identified by the School District of Philadelphia as a Renaissance School.

The goal was to employ AVP’s workshops to aid the entire staff in developing the skills and awareness needed to successfully work with students traumatized by violence. Having cited 138 reported incidences of school violence from September 2011 through February 2012 at the former school, American Paradigm school administrators stepped in to transform the school into a peaceful and productive learning environment.

“Our goal is to develop positive blueprints for neighborhoods where excellent educational choices are absent,” Cruise said. “When the School District of Philadelphia called for a turnaround of John Paul Jones Middle School, we saw an opportunity to completely revolutionize the learning experience for the students in this neighborhood. We aspired to change the lives of our students for the better, which led us to join forces with the Alternatives to Violence Project.”

The Alternatives to Violence Project was founded to address violence in prison communities by introducing innovative ways to resolve conflict while reducing the need to resort to violence as a solution. In early September 2012, AVP began its first experiential workshop with Memphis Street Academy and the Philadelphia chapter’s first venture into the middle school community.

Designed to feature improvisational exercises, the workshops taught Memphis Street administrators, educators and support staff how to decrease the number of violent incidents within their school community and instead increase the opportunities for peaceful resolutions to take place.

“The entire staff came in for a three day workshop prior to the beginning of the school year,” said community coordinator of Alternatives to Violence for Greater Philadelphia Carolyn Schodt. “Our primary goal was to create a community for the staff, faculty and administration of Memphis Street established upon trust.

“Our approach was to empower the adults and shape them into an authentic community and ultimately instill a caring school community — a focus of American Paradigm’s. In our workshops, participants learned skills like listening, observation, communication, co-

operating and the means of transforming relationships amidst conflict — all to support them in creating respectful communities within their classrooms.”

Faculty, staff and engagement coaches at Memphis Street requested further training from AVP after seeing the benefits and skill set the program provided for them and their students. A series of six advanced-level sessions were held every six weeks, on Saturdays, for interested faculty and administrators along with AVP’s volunteers only principle.

“Our partnership with AVP has been one of the most exciting and beneficial relationships we have established in our 12 years of promoting educational excellence,” Cruise said. “The experience at Memphis Street has allowed us to visualize a way to duplicate this partnership in each of American Paradigm’s schools.

“Because of the interest and participation by our staff at Memphis Street, we knew it would be a wise decision to expand our work to First Philadelphia Preparatory Charter School and Tacony Academy’s High School. From there our workshops with students was born.”